

Grundtvig Learning Partnership

Sowing the Learning Seeds

Meeting in Turkey

SUMMARY OF THE WORKSHOP

How to engage target groups in Adult Education

15 March 2012, Kahramanmaras, Turkey

The workshop focused on three key questions:

- What are the priority target groups for each partner country?
- What experiences, successes, methods and approaches can each country share?
- What recommendations or practical suggestions can partners make based on their experience?

Participants were split into three groups: Estonia, Slovenia formed separate groups and the Netherlands, Hungary and Ireland formed a third group.

Target Groups:

Estonia: Target groups include people without primary education, early school leavers – age between 17-27. People without a profession, people who have been unemployed for long time, and men.

Slovenia: Target groups include elderly people, unemployed, early school leavers, people with special needs, mentally disabled people, prisoners and ex-prisoners.

The Netherlands: Target groups include people with literacy difficulties, women, single parents, low skilled males.

Ireland: Target groups include people with low skills, people with literacy difficulties, people who are long term unemployed (i.e. over one year), young men, early school leavers.

Hungary: Target groups include immigrants, elderly people living in remote rural areas and early school leavers.

Experiences, approaches and methods:

Estonia:

- Organised a Learning bus during Adult Learners' Week
- Important to meet people face to face, personal contact and counselling
- Sometimes it is better to meet people at local level, because they are not able to go to courses to a town/city (for example, in a little town there was a factory that was shut down and lot of people were unemployed. The local government organised courses for these people in their own town).
- Go to groups who have already identified/established themselves. Go to events where there are lot of people already.

Slovenia:

- Study circles – these provide opportunities to bring together different target groups and promote learning
- Connect with bigger events (eg Learning Festivals) and promote activities such as study circles
- Be creative and relevant about how people are engaged with adult learning – for example one study circle used coffee to engage the group – learners learned about different cultures, rituals and subjects by using 'coffee' as a starting point. The study circle included both 'learning aims' and 'action aims'.
- Always start with one person, who can encourage other people
- Always offer the opportunity to directly participate in some form of learning following their initial expression of interest
- Compel people to participate – for some target groups motivation to learn may be very low. By compelling people initially their interest and motivation will grow.
- Identify one contact person at local level through whom it is easier to promote. Trainer is not necessarily someone from outside but could be someone among the group.

Ireland/Hungary/Netherlands:

- **Ireland** has developed a successful approach in engaging men in adult learning. The Men's' Sheds (<http://www.menssheds.ie>) movement originally started in Australia and there are now a number of them all around Ireland. Men are engaged in adult learning at a local shed – where the point of engagement may be fixing a lawnmower or motorbike. The success of the approach is due to the recognition that men learn and communicate differently – their slogan is '*Men don't talk face to face, they talk shoulder to shoulder*'. The shed provides a positive environment for them to share skills and explore other learning opportunities.
- **The Netherlands** has successfully used the idea of 'learning ambassadors' to promote learning to particular target groups. People with experience of overcoming challenges such as literacy difficulties are encouraged to act as advocates and encourage other learners. Advertising campaigns in Ireland on the theme of adult literacy have also been highly effective in raising awareness about adult literacy and numeracy. People are encouraged to take direct action through a freephone number where they can get assistance.
- **All three countries** use Learning Festivals to encourage learners to promote their positive experiences of learning.

- **Hungary** has worked very effectively with members of the Roma community – by listening and understanding cultural differences. By working first with leaders within the Roma community, they have managed to find a successful entry point. The leader has helped by encouraging Roma people to participate.
- **Community outreach in Ireland** – through dedicated staff members in a variety of educational settings both formal and non formal, who are responsible for recruiting and engaging target group members, and creating a positive learning environment based on the needs of the target groups.

Recommendations:

All three groups came up with some recommendations which should inform the engagement of target groups in planning future adult learning campaigns. These include:

- Trust is crucial – target groups may have had negative experiences of adult learning in the past and building trust is the starting point
- More research is needed in this area – to identify what approaches work with what target groups. We need to measure what we do and evaluate our experiences.
- Engagement with groups who are already formed and where motivation is high is key.
- Strategies such as community outreach take time, energy and money. These roles need to be recognised and resourced appropriately.
- Use learners with direct experience of learning to promote and advocate the benefits – in a variety of places (eg media, advertising, learning Festivals)
- Use relevant topics and themes to engage target groups in learning. Think about what is important to the particular target group
- Try and motivate/encourage target groups to participate themselves
- Build in the opportunity to take direct immediate action when the motivation is there – eg to sign up for a course or get further information.
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The workshop was led by János Tóth.

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